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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 4122
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3260
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2307
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 3821
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 2369
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 1553
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SUBJECT: Jordan/H5N1: Government to Compensate for Culled
Flocks

REF: Amman 2176

1. Summary: As of 1630 local time on March 30, there have been no new cases of H5N1 avian influenza in Jordan since the original cases first reported on March 24. GOJ officials feel they have the situation under control. On March 28, the GOJ announced that it will compensate farmers in the Kufranjeh/Ajloun area for poultry culled by authorities on the farms that were within the six kilometer radius of the confirmed cases (reftel). Details on the compensation plan have not been announced. The GOJ has also decided to destroy a controversial shipment of minced turkey from Israel despite the inspection results that proved that there are no health hazards. According to the GOJ spokesman, destroying the shipment aims at eliminating public panic. Post plans to hold additional "Town Hall" meetings on AI on April 6. End summary.

Intensive Monitoring Ongoing at Site

2. Dr. Faris Al-Bakhit, Veterinary Director at the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) told FAS FSN that the MOA is closely monitoring the Kufranjeh/Ajloun area, where the confirmed cases were found. He said that the MOA considers three days without further cases as a critical period but that thirty days must pass before they consider the outbreak completely stamped out. He said veterinary authorities have inspected a 10 kilometer radius and no further H5N1 cases have been found. The MOA has culled 12,714 commercial poultry and 7,364 domestic and wild birds. Dr. Al-Bakhit noted that all updates and procedures will be discussed in the regional OIE

conference in Beirut on April 6-7. Post understands that Cairo-based USDA/APHIS officials will attend that meeting.

Surveillance Continuing; Media Plan Imminent

¶3. Embassy contacts and press reports note that careful, active monitoring is underway elsewhere around Jordan as well. Dr. Ali As'ad, Secretary General for Technical Affairs at the Ministry of Health (MOH), told AID FSN that MOH is expanding surveillance, especially at farms. Teams from the Royal Medical Services, MOA and MOH are performing active surveillance, with samples being taken for testing. Dr. As'ad said the GOJ's media plan is almost ready to launch. The MOH has requested funding for this plan, but funding has not yet been approved. The media plan is being implemented under a USAID project on health communication that was already in place with Johns Hopkins University and the Ministry of Health.

Government to Compensate Farmers

¶4. To date, the GOJ has committed only to compensate farmers for the birds that were culled by GOJ authorities from the farms within six kilometers of the confirmed cases, as announced on March 28 by Minister of Agriculture Akef Al-Zubi. Also on March 28, Minister of Industry and Trade Sharif Zu'bi (no relation to the Minister of Agriculture) said that the Cabinet has formed a committee to look into a mechanism that would compensate poultry farmers for losses from bird flu. This mechanism would have a wider scope than

the approved compensation for the Kufranjeh culling, but the topic is still being discussed within the GOJ and no further details are available.

Regional Coordination Meeting - March 27

¶5. On March 27, GOJ officials met with their Israeli counterparts at the Allenby Bridge to exchange information on avian flu. FAS FSN was told that the two sides discussed and evaluated their respective responses to the outbreaks. Participants from the Palestinian Authority were apparently invited but were unable to attend. MOH Secretary General As'ad told AID FSN on March 29 that the Jordanian and Israeli parties expressed concern that the lack of compensation plans for culling poultry in Gaza threatens both Israel and Jordan with continuing outbreaks. The parties agreed to continue sharing information on AI in a transparent fashion.

AI in the Media - Calls to Save Poultry Sector

¶6. Arabic daily Ad-Dustour reported that the price of chicken has fallen as low as \$0.70 per kilo, and that demand for poultry has dropped by 90%. (Note: Government statistics agencies are not able to measure real-time demand for fresh poultry. Domestic poultry production figures are published on a 3-4 month lag time. End Note.) In a statement to Ad-Dustour, Restaurant Owners Association President Raed Hamada said bird flu in Jordan has led to a 50% drop in restaurant sales. He urged the government to exempt restaurant owners from sales taxes and interest on bank loans so that restaurants will be able to meet their obligations to their workers.

¶7. Arabic daily Al-Rai reported that between February and March, the prices of local, imported, and frozen meat have gone up by 5%, the price of fish has gone up by 9%, and the price of eggs decreased by 20%. The report refers to a study conducted by the Control and Quality Department at the

Ministry of Industry and Trade, which compared changes in the prices of 54 commodities between last month and this month.

Poultry Farmers Stage Sit-In

¶8. Arabic Al-Arab Al-Yawm reported that the lack of sufficient information in the public domain on avian flu is causing public anxiety. Al-Arab Al-Yawm reported that a number of medical specialists confirmed that eating cooked poultry meat and eggs cannot transfer the virus to humans. Dailies also reported that poultry farmers and farm owners staged a sit-in March 27 at the Ministry of Interior, demanding the government find ways to market and sell their poultry. The dailies also reported that commercial poultry de-feathering centers in Amman governorate have closed down, and that slaughterhouses there have refused to receive live chickens.

Ajloun Governor to Re-Open All Chicken Processing in Ajloun

¶9. According to Al-Arab Al-Yawm, Ajloun Governor Ahmad Shiyab authorized the re-opening of chicken processing in his governorate after he received confirmation from authorities that there are no new bird flu cases. Shiyab noted that the precautionary measures taken by authorities helped control the outbreak. Shiyab met with poultry farm owners in Ajloun, who complained to him about the losses they have suffered. He responded that the culling of the birds in their farms and other precautionary measures were critical to control the spread of H5N1 disease and to safeguard their health and that of all citizens.

Embassy Town Hall Scheduled

¶10. Post will have additional "Town Hall" meetings on April 6 as recommended in Post's Avian Flu Trip Wires Plan to update and educate Embassy staff on the current avian flu situation. A large-scale Embassy event for the American community is also being planned, as are further public diplomacy events on avian influenza.

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